



TIDBITS

Tips and Helpful Links

Increasing Performance Expectations for Students with Disabilities

The U.S. Department of Education has broadened its focus, moving beyond compliance monitoring to include gathering statistics on educational results and outcomes for students with disabilities. “Results-Driven Accountability” (RDA) will now be part of each state’s annual determination under IDEA. The inclusion of RDA was prompted by a continued lag in improved reading and math outcomes as well as lack of improvement in graduation rates among students with disabilities. Areas being considered for tracking under RDA include participation in state assessments, the proficiency gaps that exist between student with disabilities and their general education peers, and NAEP reading and math performances. Based on 2012-13 data, Arizona fell into the “needs assistance” category. If this designation continues for a second year, we will be required to obtain [technical assistance](#). Arizona may also be identified as a high-risk grant recipient.

“While the Common Core standards are not federal policy, Duncan’s message certainly lined up with the Core: states must set goals for what special ed students are actually learning, which tends to be measured by standardized tests, and they should stick to “high expectations” and a “robust curriculum.” This is in contrast to the current “compliance model,” where the Feds’ role is simply to check that states are providing support and access to the curriculum...”

(Source: nprED [“Asking Kids with Special Needs to Clear the Same Bar”](#) by Anya Kamenetz July 01, 2014)

According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), 13 percent of public school students receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Of those, 36 percent have “specific learning disabilities” and 21 percent have “speech or language impairments.” Another 22 percent have autism, intellectual disabilities, a developmental delay, or multiple disabilities. Very few have hearing, vision, or motor issues alone.

The cognitive capabilities of students with high incidence disabilities, such as SLD and SLI, fall within the average range. Given the necessary accommodations and specialized programming, these students are expected to successfully engage in grade level instruction and assessment, keeping pace with their non-disabled peers. The reality of their situation does not bear this out. “Two-thirds of students with disabilities are performing well below grade level in reading and math. By the eighth grade, that figure rises to 90 percent.”

According to a Cornell University resource for disability statistics, as many as one in five individuals with a disability do not graduate from high school. In a [report](#) from the Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Special Education Research published in 2011, students in high incidence special education categories such as SLD, Speech & Language, ED, and OHI had poor postsecondary enrollment numbers (45-60%) and degree completion numbers (34-48%) in a variety of

programs. This same group had employment numbers ranging from 64-78%, but most were employed in low wage jobs with hourly pay in the \$9-10 range or annual salaries of \$25,000 or less. The report also details involvement with the criminal justice system indicating that between 16% and 49% of these individuals have been arrested.

Given the new accountability measures being implemented for students with disabilities along with the increased demands of Arizona's College and Career Ready standards, IEP teams will need to carefully consider program options to ensure that these students receive needed services and accommodations in the least restrictive environment. Since most students with high incidence disabilities spend about 80% of their school day in the general education classroom, it's important that lessons and activities are accessible. A variety of lesson presentation, engagement, and response options will help make content comprehensible and also [provide choice](#) – not only for students with special needs, but all students. Developing lessons and units with multiple options is time consuming, so collaboration among grade level teams is essential. Ideally these teams should include special area teachers as well as special education experts who bring unique perspectives and methodologies to the table. Co-teaching is an excellent way of ensuring that both grade level content and diverse student needs are consistently addressed.

In addition to strategizing with a diverse team, teachers can look to technology for options that make grade level content accessible and appealing. Consistent use will familiarize students with special needs with the [many tools and features](#) (takes a few moments to load) offered through technology as well as give them greater control over their own learning. Consultations with assistive technology experts will keep teachers abreast of innovations that may benefit individual students. Technology departments within districts can also be consulted to brainstorm ideas for providing different access options, expanding choice to improve enthusiasm and engagement.

Technology is integral to [blended learning models](#) which personalize learning according to needs. Regular progress monitoring will indicate student growth as well as provide feedback to teachers for lesson adjustments, made in a timely manner, to maintain students' trajectory toward mastery of grade level standards. Teachers engaged in the [formative process](#) utilize a feedback loop to acquire information about student understandings, and then provide real-time guidance and appropriate scaffolding to ensure comprehension as students advance along a learning progression.



The challenges presented by the standards and the inclusion of RDA outcomes for students with disabilities may seem daunting at first, but by reaching out and developing a support network teachers can take the first steps toward improving instruction for students with special needs. School leadership has a vested interest in ensuring successful outcomes for these students as well, so teacher initiatives may serve as models for broader applications at multiple grade levels. Exploration of the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) dedicated to data-driven instruction is an excellent option for bringing professionals together for collaborative work. Members of PLC teams can take on roles to [develop aspects of lessons and units](#), easing the burden on individual teachers and ensuring engaging, accessible lessons utilizing principles of [Universal Design](#). Start the conversation at your school site and make a commitment to changes that will prove beneficial not only to those with special needs, but all the students you serve.

NCSC Community of Practice

Arizona's NCSC Community of Practice has been a critical component in the transition process to the new alternate assessment for several years. During this implementation year we are opening CoP membership to all teachers, test coordinators, and special education directors as another avenue of instructional resource and information sharing.

Alternate Assessment on our newly redesigned ADE Website has [tabs](#) to webinar call dates, topics, and archived webinar calls.

Please join us on our monthly calls, beginning the week of August 11, for discussion of topics of interest to all who support students with special needs.

It's for you...



Important Upcoming Dates

- NCSC Pilot 2 – October 10 through November 14
- NCSC Operational Assessment for ELA and Math – late spring 2015
- AIMS A Science (grades 4, 8, and 10) – February 15 through March 31

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